

YOUNG STORYTELLERS: POETRY OUT LOUD

OUR STORYTELLING NATURE

All of us are storytellers by nature, conveying our thoughts and experiences moment to moment. And whether we are communicating to our families or a complete stranger, the meaning and sentiment behind our words come to life when we speak rather than take pen to paper. The oral art form of poetry is a perfect example of this. "Hearing a poem spoken aloud, we discover that a poem is, before anything else, an event of the ear. The meaning of the poem lies as much in the sound of its words as in their sense," explains John Barr, poet and President of the Poetry Foundation.

A NATIONAL CONTEST

Barr and Dana Gioia, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) have worked together with countless other partners throughout the nation to build a movement to make poetry a mainstream activity again, and this movement is the National Recitation Contest—Poetry Out Loud.

Poetry Out Loud encourages high school students to develop the ability to clearly and with confidence convey the meaning of a poem to an audience. Through the study, memorization, and performance of poems, students learn the importance of words and how these words can connect them to a different time and place that they may have more in common with than they had thought. "What we really want to do is to open up the whole world of poetry to these kids and show them that almost anything that's part of human experience, there is a great poem about," said Chairman Gioia in an interview on National Public Radio.



NEA survey. Twenty counties participated in 2007-

In California, Poetry Out Loud has skyrocketed, involving more schools than any other state, according to an

08: Alameda, Contra Costa, Fresno, Humboldt, Lake, Los Angeles, Madera, Marin, Mendocino, Monterey, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Siskiyou, Sonoma, Tuolumne, and Ventura.

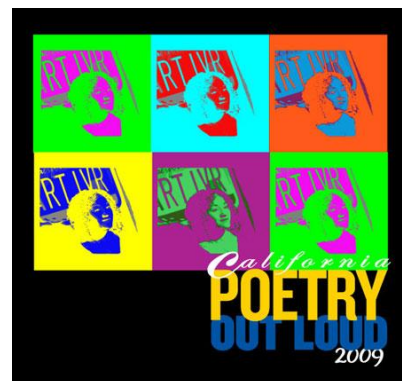
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This year, the California Arts Council has been inundated with emails from teachers and students statewide who want to find out how to get involved in the program.

Teachers have described the camaraderie and enthusiasm their students display when participating in Poetry Out Loud.

These teachers understand the central objective of Poetry Out Loud: to familiarize students with the best of their literary heritage, while teaching them important public speaking skills. This program is not intended to replace classroom activities like creative writing; in fact, the two naturally complement each other. Teachers appreciate the funded professional poet classroom visits, and the free hard copy and online materials. Moreover, they understand that their students are participating in something beyond the classroom and are truly gaining a love of poetry. Shawntay Henry, winner of the 2008 Poetry Out Loud National Competition in Washington D.C. said, "I thought poetry was boring, but when you really listen to the words and recite it on stage, it comes alive and you can feel that, and you have to make sure the audience feels that too. I hope this is an opportunity for me to open doors for younger children ... to let them know that poetry is not what it seems."

Poetry Out Loud will not only significantly increase students' confidence in themselves and their own abilities, but it will also strengthen skills they will





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use in the future as they become part of the workforce and communities they live in. Year four of California Poetry Out Loud, beginning this fall, hopes to make memorizing and reciting poetry a typical activity again in every California high school.

Poetry Out Loud is being administered by the California Arts Council and materials are available now. If you want your school or county to participate this year, please contact kmargolis@cac.ca.gov and check out the online materials for [Poetry Out Loud](#).

